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ABSTRACT

In 1993, a new history syllabus for years 7-10 was implemented in schools in New South Wales (Australia). The syllabus mandated 100 hours of study of Australian history, to include 5 broad topics: Australian identity, Australian heritage, international relations, women's history, and Aboriginal history. Interviews with eight teachers and an examination of textbooks in metropolitan Sydney revealed that the majority of schools had purchased copies of "Checkerboard," the first published text supporting the new syllabus. Some schools had purchased topic books and kits that covered specific course sections. In the majority of schools, the mandated hours had been placed in years 7-8. Teacher reactions to the syllabus reflected both concerns over the planning processes at the school level as the syllabus was introduced and concerns about the syllabus as a reflection of substantive and syntactic representations of the discipline of history. A number of concerns were expressed about the syllabus' inquiry-based approach. The "heritage" and "international relations" areas of the course were felt to be difficult to resource. The study concludes that school-based curriculum development is still alive, that book budgets to implement the course were small or nonexistent, and that schools developed their own printed resources to support the course. (Contains 14 references.) (JDD)

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# Textbook Usage in the Implementation of the New History 7-10 Syllabus: A NSW Perspective

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## *Research Context*

This paper is a report on the initial findings of a research project concerned with identifying the range of textbook resources used by teachers in the implementation of the new Years 7-10 History Syllabus . This Syllabus was released into NSW schools at the end 1992 for implementation in 1993. The content and structure of the document represent a considerable departure from former syllabus offerings. Beyond these changes, all students in NSW schools must now undertake a study of Australian history for 100 hours at some stage across Years 7-10 ( Excellence and Equity, 1989). As a consequences, the Syllabus has been designed around a mandated core of Australian history, with further options available for those students who wish to extend their historical studies beyond the mandated hours.

Within the mandatory section of the Syllabus, five broad topic areas have been designated for study - Australian identity, heritage, international relations, women's history and Aboriginal history. The subject matter of the mandatory core and the options is structured around key focus questions to which all student learning is directed. The Syllabus does not prescribe specific content nor mandate approaches to the teaching of history, although it does endorse inquiry- based learning.

A strong emphasis throughout the Syllabus has been placed on student-centred approaches, the use and exploration of a wide range of source materials, the investigation of present historical circumstances through the past and issues arising out of the history of women, Aboriginal history and other contenporary concerns.

It was the view of the researchers that as a result of curriculum change many of the texts used in the teaching of Australian history would no longer be directly relevant. It was assumed that many history departments with little money to expend on new resources and bookrooms bulging with outmoded materials would find the business of planning for syllabus implementation difficult. It was also assumed that such circumstances would provide useful insights into teachers' initial reponses to the Syllabus and highlight the various strategies that teachers' use to cope with both substantial curriculum change resource concerns.

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## *Purpose of the Study*

The purposes of this study are to:

- identify the range and type of textbook resources that teachers and schools are using to implement the new Years 7-10 History Syllabus

- identify what new and existing resources are being used by schools to support the implementation of the Syllabus.

- compare and cross-reference these resources with a typology of text resources developed by the researchers

- identify appropriate text materials within schools that teachers can use to more fully implement the new Syllabus.

- develop a compendium of text resources to facilitate professional associations to assist teachers in the implementation of the Syllabus.

## *Research Methodology*

**(i) Mixed method approach**

The study is based around three interconnected methodologies:

- interviews of approximately three quarters of an hour with eight Head Teachers History / Human Society and its Environment Head Teachers, to determine what resources are currently being used to support the Syllabus

- a bookroom study to determine the range, age and titles of texts and other resources used to support history teaching , Years 7-`10. (Bookroom and interview data have analysed to assess the relationship between text resources and the nature of syllabus implementation)

- a focus group interview, still to be to be conducted, in which the findings of data analysis will be clarified and negotiated with the interviewees.

**(ii) Selection of schools and geographical setting**

This research was carried out in Government and non-Government schools in the Metropolitan South-West Region of Sydney. Both systems were included in the study on the basis of differences in textbook resource access between private and public schools identified by previous studies ( Laws and Horsley, 1992). The South-West Region was chosen as it is the largest and fastest growing in NSW, with approximately the same number of pupils as the West Australian education system.

After gaining approval to conduct research through the Department of School Education Regional Research Committee, twelve government schools in 5 clusters were approached by telephone and then mail to ascertain their willingness to participate . All the schools approached agreed to be involved. The results in this paper represent the research findings from the six Government and two non-Government schools surveyed to date.

**(iii) Resources being used in the implementation of the new course**

The majority of schools had purchased copies of *Checkerboard* - the first text to be released onto the market to support the new Syllabus. Interviewees tended to have misgivings over these purchases and rationalised their actions on the basis of dire teacher and student need. Most schools had opted to purchase a 'whole course' text, although several had pursued alternative approaches, choosing to buy topic book that gave sound coverage. For example, Nadia Wheatley's *My Place* had been bought by two schools for the heritage section of the course. Of the schools surveyed one had bought the NSW Board of Studies Kit, two had purchased the Heritage Commission Kit, two had bought videos and cassettes to support the new course and only one was making conspicious use of Board and DSE support documents.

**(iv) Response to the Syllabus**

As expected, teacher response to the new syllabus reflected a continuum from resigned acceptance to enthusiastic approval. One way of conceptualising teacher response has been proposed by Hall. This suggests that teachers initially have personal concerns about how proposed changes will impact on their work . After inservice programs and planning at the school level, personal concerns give way to management concerns about the approach and efficacy of the proposed changes for the students and the school.

In this context, teacher reactions to the Years 7-10 History Syllabus reflected both concerns over the planning processes at the school level as the syllabus was introduced, and the approach of the syllabus itself as a reflection of substantive and syntactic representations of the discipline of History when compared with the previous syllabus.

In half the schools surveyed teachers experienced clear difficulties in planning for the new course. Words describing teachers' reactions to their initial efforts included ' stumbling,' 'time pressure,' 'disjointed', 'lack of continuity,' ' lack of resources,' ' plans did not work out '. These comments may spring from unresolved personal concerns associated with the management of planning activities, such as the failure to allocate and organise time for staff programming sessions. Response to the Syllabus tended to be negative in those school where programs has not been formalised or remained unwritten.

In schools where internal preparations for implementation were comprehensive, HeadTeachers reported that initial negative reactions had given way to more positive responses, as teachers became familiar with the Syllabus . In these instances, teachers were looking to restructure initial programs in light of the results of earlier trialling .

However, in responding to the Syllabus itself, a number of concerns were expressed about its inquiry-based approach. These reflected the dependence of some teachers on chronology as a major means of structuring historical studies. These individuals perceived the mandated questions as too broad, and any programs developed from the Syllabus would lack continuity and coherence as a consequence. The choices, problems and issues offered by the syllabus in many cases were not viewed as possibilities but as problematic. Some teachers found it difficult to make professional decisions on programming when confronted with choice. They tended to read the document in a literal manner. Difficulties were encountered as the Syllabus does not represent the discipline in a traditional or familiar format.

Analysis of non-History HSIE Head Teachers' perceptions of the Syllabus suggest that their major concerns are resource rather than discipline based. In one instance, a HSIE Head Teacher was the only one in the department using the implementation documents of the Department of School Education and the NSW Board of Studies. These were utilised in a structural sense - as a survival kit or source of

guidance, with little recognition of the relationship between content knowledge and appropriate pedagogy in the teaching of history ( Wilson, Wineburg 1988). Social Science teachers with no History background involved in teaching the course described it as 'not bad'. They assumed that the inquiry-based orientation of the new Syllabus reflected a 'generic HSIE approach' that would mitigate their own lack of content knowledge. Thus, teaching strategies that were utilised in Geography and other social science type courses were seen as adequate in compensating for lack of content knowledge. In these circumstances, resources become important. They represent the content on which knowledge and skills outcomes are ultimately based.

**(v) Finding out about new resources**

A number of strategies exist to locate appropriate resources to support the new Syllabus . A continuum exists from active searching, locating and networking ( stemming ) to passive responses to advertising materials from publishers, booksellers, educational and curriculum authorities and professional associations.

• *Publishers and booksellers* - all schools appreciated being sent flyers which described new resources for the syllabus.

• *Publisher visits* - three representatives had visited three of the schools in the sample ( Heinemann, Oxford, Macmillan ) and had introduced Head Teachers and staff to new resources. These visits were perceived as helpful. In two of the schools surveyed, staff attended launches of new texts and found author discussion of text approaches and usage helpful. At one launch, all teachers attending were given a free copy of the text.

• *Bookseller visits* - interviewees mentioned that booksellers had visited three of the schools. In one school, staff had appreciated a system where the bookseller had left copies of resources for a month so that staff could assess a range of texts properly. This enabled teachers to make an informed choice about the best text to suit the needs of their students.

• *History teachers' professional journals* - the History Teachers ' Association of NSW produces a journal which disseminates information on history teaching matters. It has published support materials for the new syllabus. These comprise articles and commentaries on approaches to planning, pedagogy and teaching. Only three departments in the school sample were members of the Association - although individual on staff may have held membership. This was not determined. Two of the teachers interviewed also used materials published by the Victorian History Teachers' Association to support the course. Approximately half the sample were not using professional history teachers' associations to locate resources suitable.

• *Implementation Kits* - A number of implementation and teaching kits have been produced to support the new syllabus. However, the materials, guidance and resources these kits contain were only used in one school.

• *In-Service* - inservice is often seen as a starting point for understanding the approach of a new syllabus and in identifying important resources that may assist in its implementation. In the South-West Region of Sydney, there exists an active branch of the History Teachers' Association of NSW which conducted inservice activities to support teachers in planning for the new course. Cluster and regional DSE meetings were also held. At a central level, the State History Teachers ' Association conducted a series of inservices associated with implementation strategies. At HTA inservices,

**(v) Bookroom study**
A feature of this research project is the bookroom study - a quantitative analysis of the resource stock held by either the History or HSIE Department in each of the sample schools. This study followed the interview, which included a discussion of the important text resources currently being used to support syllabus implementation. A database was compiled on the books, videos, tapes, kits and supplementary materials used to resource the new course. Resource details were recorded; publishers, year of publication, numbers of titles and the syllabus topics these resources supported.

## *Research Findings*

**(i) Placement of the mandated hours across Years 7-10**
In the majority of schools surveyed, the mandated hours had been placed in Years 7-8. Most interviewees indicated that their original preference for placement had been Years 9-10 on the basis of:

* existing resources
* the potential loss of student numbers at the elective level
* the suitability of Syllabus content for older students.

Two of the sample schools had opted to integrate the mandated hours over Years 7-10 . Although this lessened the number of hours of tuition in any given year, all students took History over the full four year period 7-10.

In most schools the principal decided on placement. Decisions appear to have been based on pragmatic concerns such as timetabling. The K-12 continuum failed to be mentioned as a factor in determining placement.

**(ii) Programming the new course**
The amount of time spent on curriculum planning varied across the sample. Approaches to programming were also diverse . Eighteen months after initial implementation, two of the sample schools were without programs, another was in the process of trialling, while another was in the latter stages of program evaluation and redevelopment. The staff in one school had spent two full days designing the new mandatory course, while in another individual teachers wrote units that were then utilised by all staff members.

In these early phases of planning, interpretations of the Syllabus tended to be 'conservative'. In most cases, each of the mandatory questions was treated separately. Some form of integration had occurred in the development of a Years 7-10 HSIE program. However, in this situation, the mixing of a range of syllabuses inhibited any meaningful translation of the intent of the Years 7-10 History Syllabus.

The majority of interviewees outlined a series of problems associated with the change. These were related to time , resources and the expertise of staff. Also some suggested that they encountered difficulties in programming due to a lack of personal direction. One of these individuals suggested that her thinking or 'mindset' about history had to be changed. For her, the content and processes of the Syllabus were difficult to conceptualise.

The schools selected for this study represent:
• a wide diversity of coeducational ( three ) and single sex schools ( two girls' and one boys' school ) within a reasonable geographic distance

• a diversity of student populations. The South-West is the most ethnically diverse educational region in NSW

• a balance between established and 'new' schools. The length of establishment is seen as an important for the resource focus of this research.

The non-Government schools included an established Catholic systemic girls school and a new community coeducational school recently set up by an ethnic religious group.

**(iii) Development of survey ouestions**
The interview questions were developed to ascertain the role of text resources in the implementation of the new History Syllabus. They were derived from reflection on previous research ( Young 1993, Horsley 1994, Laws and Horsley 1992, Maw 1990 ) which studied the impact of curriculum resources on teaching and learning in schools. The questions were also developed to complement a bookroom study designed to reveal the nature and range of text resources held by the History Department in each school and as a means of triangulating interview data.

The questions deal with a number of areas:
• teachers' responses to the new syllabus and its placement within the school curriculum

• resources used to support the new course and the utilisation or otherwise of existing resources

• the range and number of new resources purchased to support the new course and the means by which these were identified

• the features, strengths and weaknesses of new texts and resource materials developed to support the new course.

A pilot study of the questions was carried out by the researchers at a non-Government school. The questions were approved by a regional research committee from the Department of School Education and a group of publishers also made comment. All questions were provided to schools and interviewees prior to the interview.

**(iv) Interview procedures**
Interviews were conducted by the researchers working as a pair. Copies of the questions were taken to each interview and placed before the interviewee. While one researcher conducted the interview the other recorded responses.

At the conclusion of each interview and bookroom study the researchers compared notes and impressions. Data were later analysed in light of the major concerns of this study. This approach assisted in the development of insights into specific school contexts and allowed for cross locational comparisons.

## *Conclusions/Recommendations*

**Curriculum implementation.....**
Curriculum implementation was totally contextual with only a few similarities between schools. Even though the syllabus mandated broad learning areas, the selection of content, the structuring of courses, the placement of the 100 hours across Years 7-10 and resource selection within each school suggested that school-based curriculum development is still alive! . Research findings suggest that initial fears concerning prescription of content have no foundation in practice.

**Resource utilisation.....**
In most instances, implementation book budgets were small or non-existent, ranging from a maximum of $8000 to no expenditure, with an average budget of $2000 for one and a half class sets of books. For all schools the buying of a text represented a capital decision not a recurrent one. The text was to be used in many cases for an entire year, with one set serving 8 to 16 classes. All schools operated in a culture where there was emphasis on the cost of resources and the inability of the school to pay for them.

**Implemetation resources.....**
Schools developed their own printed resources to support the course. These included sets of printed sheets, small booklets, school department kits and photocopies. These resources contravened copyright provisions. The research suggests that school based resources were produced for three interrelated p purposes:

* to meet students specific language and learning needs schools developed special worksheets and booklets as the existing published materials did not meet these needs.

* to support certain topics on which there was an absence of relevant and affordable material schools developed their own resource packages

* many of the resources developed by schools were intended to reduce implementation costs and to recycle and retread old resources. The resource stock in most book rooms dates from the late 70's and mid 80's when money was available to purchase texts for students.

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publishers often mounted displays of new resources, while some portion of the regional and cluster inservices were also devoted to the resource requirements of the new course. Of the sample schools, three had not attended any organised inservice activity and as a consequence were less aware of new resources that could be used to plan, implement and support the course.

•*School Based Resource Collection* - a number of schools developed coherent and organised strategies in an attempt to coordinate and support the implementation of the new Syllabus. At one school the Head Teacher was a writer of a new text book for the course and was able to share resources she was using with the staff. As well, this school was invited to prepare resources for a Board of Studies' implementation kit for teachers. As a consequence the school had access to a wide range of materials. In three schools the staff were organised into teams to write support materials for the new course which took into account the specific needs of their students. Half of the schools surveyed had purchased copies of all recently published texts for staff reference.

**(vi) Parts of the syllabus that are difficult to resource.**
The responses to this question fell into two distinct groups. In approximately half of the schools surveyed most areas of the course were seen as difficult to resource - in the sense of supporting the students at the school level with appropriate written support materials for the unit being taught.

In the other half of the sample only specific areas were perceived as difficult. In these cases, the main problem was related to circumstance where existing resources presented subject matter and approaches that generated old perceptions of an issue or topic under consideration.

Two area of the new syllabus received most comment as being difficult to resource:

*Heritage* - five schools ranked this as the most difficult area to resource. In part this reflected the changes in teaching style required by the new Syllabus. The heritage area required teachers to contextualise history for their students - as a result it would be difficult to develop written materials to support a passive didactic methodology for this unit. In fact, most school reported that they were developing community links, field trip material and inductive worksheets to support this area of their teaching.

*International relations* - four schools expressed difficulty with Question 3. It was felt that the existing materials could not reflect the new approach required by the syllabus and that a continuing emphasis on war and conflict reflected an ' old way of thinking about these issues '.

**(vii) Comments on newly purhcased resources**
The majority of those interviewed were in agreement with the following research findings:

• most of the recently published texts for Years 7-10 History are not geared to the need of students with learning difficulties

• the main problem area with resourcing the new course lies in finding materials and texts that meet these needs and those of students with reading problems - 'kids here have reading problems'.

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*Draft Survey Questions*

1. Where has the new syllabus been placed in 7-10.

2. Is the choice of content different now compared to the former 7-10 programs? Are you using past programs? Have you written a new program? What new content is in the program?

3. What resources are you using to support the implementation of the new syllabus? Have you bought any new textbooks? What old resources are you using? How are you using this? What problems have you encountered in doing this? Have you bought any other resources?

4. Are you using old resources in a different way?

5. How have teachers in your school responded to the new syllabus?

6. How has your staff found out about new resources?

Professional Development
•Regional Inservice
•Clusters and Regional
•Other Professional Development

HTA and Journal

Flyers - Booksellers

7. What are the parts of the syllabus that are difficult to resource? How do you approach resourcing these areas?

8. Comment on any new material you have bought for -

- coverage of the subject matter content
- teaching and learning strategies
- catering for diverse learners
- user friendliness and usability for teachers and students
- approach to the junior syllabus (either integrated/5 separate question).

9. If you had the opportunity to design resources you would like to meet your and your students' needs - what would they be like?

10. Any other comments. Would you like to expand on the above comments.